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house to house, transform the streets into gaily lighted tunnels. The piazza is usually draped in flags, and all the clubs are also dressed in their festal finery and their doors thrown open to the public. Many bands are hired and the mountains of fireworks are fused and made ready. All this is done before the visitors from outside arrive, and involves a great deal of organization, time and money.

The festa is thus an occasion on which communal values are reaffirmed and strengthened, as individuals and groups express their loyalty to their patron saint and unite to defend and enhance the reputation of their village. At the same time, the central position which the Church occupies in the social structure is strongly reinforced, for the parish church is the hub around which this festive occasion turns.

A festa is also an occasion on which the bonds of kinship are reinforced, for each family opens its doors to its relations, especially to those who live in other villages. Grown sons and daughters return to their parental home, forming, for a few hours, a grand family with a depth of three or four generations. Because of this influx of relatives, younger children learn to recognize more distant relatives whom they might not see at any other time of the year, and become aware of the network of kin relations that stretches out from their home. As parents become momentarily more indulgent during the festa and relax their watchfulness, it is also a favourite meeting time for courting couples and a traditional occasion on which marriageable boys and girls are introduced to one another.

The celebration of a village festa usually lasts three days. It consists of religious ceremonies, which take place principally within the church, and secular celebrations outside the church. The Maltese themselves make a distinction between these two elements in the festa: they call the former the 'internal feast' (*il-festa ta' ġewwa*) and the latter the 'external feast' (*il-festa ta' barra*). These often take place simultaneously. The mixture of sacred and profane which results was shown to me very vividly during one of the first festas I attended. I was in the church during a particularly solemn moment in the service of worship. Suddenly there was a nerve-shattering burst of fireworks from the roof of the church. Then, slowly, the sharp smell of burning gunpowder began to drift in through the open doors and mingle with the pungent odour of candles and incense. After that I ceased to be

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For several hours they wander up and down the principal streets, past the nougat vendors, past the dazzling houses with their doors and shutters thrown open to attract the eyes of all to festal drapes and carpets, gleaming cookers and new refrigerators. The crowd moves on past the packed bars and through the festooned clubs, their silver trophies all on show. Stopping now and then to eat and drink and talk with friends, they move into the church and past the banks of flowers that stand before the statue of the patron saint. From there, now surrounded by the red damask and the cut-glass crowns suspended from the golden ceilings, they pass before the silver altar-front and gaze at the jewel-encrusted reliquaries on display beside it. Now and then there is a soft discussion of price and craftsmanship as a new picture or silver candlestick reaches past the guttering candles for the attention of the crowd. Slowly, for many stop to kneel and say a prayer, the people move out through the door and past the bandstand, and on to make the round again.

The climax of the evening comes at eleven o'clock, when the forest of standing fireworks which have been planted in the square is lighted, and the second day of the festa closes in a shower of sparks and acrid smoke.

On the morning of the feast-day, there is a Solemn High Mass during which some noted clerical orator delivers a lengthy and bombastic panegyric of the saint. After the service the committees of the various clubs make formal calls on each other and exchange hospitality. The parish priest and the village clergy also call on each of the clubs and associations. Following this, the people retire to their houses for huge luncheons with their close relatives. In the late afternoon the long procession with the statue of the saint slowly moves from the church. The saint, carried by white-robed members of the confraternities, stops on the threshold to take the salute of 21 petards and barrage of smaller rockets, the *baxxa infernal*, which often last up to twenty minutes.[1] As the saint at last leaves the church he is cheered on his way by groups of shouting devotees. The crowds are thicker than the night before, and amuse themselves in much the same way. There are also more bands, and sometimes as many as five will be

[1] These petards are usually immense. They are often made from half-gallon tins packed with gelignite that is either stolen or extracted from dud shells and bombs fished up from military target areas by festa enthusiasts. Occasionally their explosions break windows.

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In addition to the sums which the parish priest spent on fireworks, another £472 was collected by six groups of enthusiasts and spent on raw materials for the fireworks which they manufactured. The total cost to the village was thus £1,212. In all respects this was an average festa for a village of 5,000.

The festa in Kortin has not always been controlled by the parish priest. Dun Bert, the present incumbent, had something of a struggle to seize and hold the reins of authority. Until he took over the parish eight years ago the external festa had been run by a committee. Though the parish priest was *ex officio* head of this committee, the actual affairs of the committee were run by old Manwel and the father of the curate, who was general manager of the festa for over thirty years. The committee also included the latter's wife's father and brother in its membership. His brother was killed twenty-five years ago in an explosion which wrecked the village's officially licensed firework factory and killed four others. This committee used to book the bands, repaint, erect and store the decorations and collect all the funds for the external feast. One of its major responsibilities was to run the two large fund-raising fairs which were held every year in the school. Next to the festa, these fairs were the favourite amusement of the village. Thus when Dun Bert arrived in Kortin, he found his was only a nominal role as far as the external festa was concerned. As he is a man who likes to run things his own way, the arrangement did not suit him. Moreover, he was concerned with the financial position of the parish, and in particular with the interest on the £3,000 that his predecessor had borrowed from the Curia to help finance the unfinished parish hall. To be able to meet all the parish's financial commitments, he felt that he had to have control of all its financial resources. The first year, however, he did very little about it.

During his second year in Kortin, the newly elected Labour Government came to his assistance, albeit unwittingly. The new Minister of Education refused permission to the organizers of the Kortin festa to hold a public fair in the school. This deprived the organizers of their major source of income, and threatened the festa. Dun Bert quickly took over the financial management of the festa and made two house-to-house collections. These raised the necessary funds and saved the festa. He then gave to the Sodality of Our Lady the responsibility of collecting threepence a week from each household. But for six months of the year these

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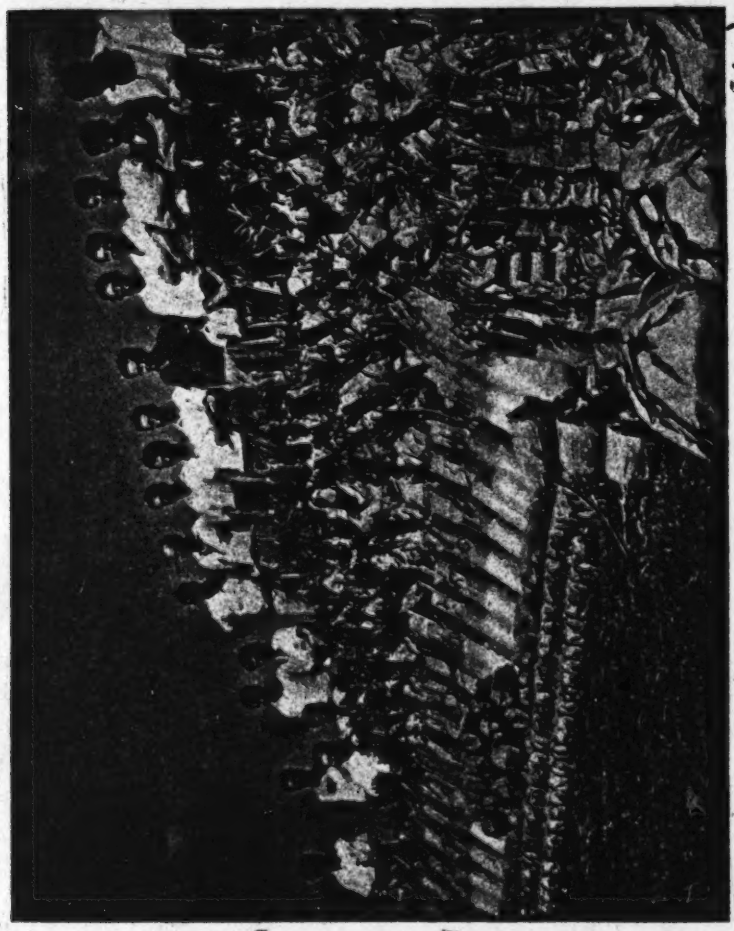

5. Fireworks for the feast of St Leonard

[facing P. 80]

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fireworkers, and without their expert help it was feared that the feast would be a miserable failure. Many Labour supporters also instructed their parents and wives not to contribute money to the feast. This depressing state of affairs continued for some time.

Then one day, about three months before the festa, Pietru, the young schoolteacher who is head of Catholic Action and treasurer of the St. Martin club, came up to me looking very pleased. He said that the feast was saved. Several events had combined to work up interest in it. It seems that most of the people had attended a large and very successful titular festa in a neighbouring village; the St. Roque fireworkers had shot off three extremely well-made test rockets; and he himself had played his tape recording of the St. Martin hymn, the anthem of the partit, over a loud-speaker in the square. These events revived interest in the festa and in the reputation of the partit. Immediately afterwards the secretary of the club, a Labour supporter who has set politics aside for the honour of the partit, called a committee meeting to discuss the problem of making fireworks. After several speeches urging members to keep their politics from spoiling the feast, the committee voted to make fireworks. Though two skilled fireworkers crossed the floor and agreed to help, none of the many experts among the rank and file followed suit. But soon after this political loyalty again began to smother the rekindled partit spirit, and one of the fireworkers all but dropped out. Moreover, Pietru, who is the village's most eloquent and outspoken enemy of the Labour Party, began to preach so vehemently to those he calls the 'lost sheep' of the club, that he antagonized many. His fund-raising suffered as a result.

About a month after this I met Toni at a festa in a neighbouring village, and we had a long talk away from the interested eyes and ears of Farrug. Toni has been a member of the St. Martin Club committee for nearly twenty years, and until some months ago had been vice president. He was clearly very worried about the club. People were already beginning to draw parallels between the present situation and the events that led up to the split in 1930. He said he was doing his best to discourage such talk, and had now begun working hard to avoid an open break.

He pointed out that he had experienced many crises in the partit and favoured a less blunt approach to winning back the interest of the MLP members than did the crusading Pietru. He felt that he

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had already had some success wooing members back on a personal basis by talking only of the honour of the partit and leaving politics out altogether. He stressed that the main problem was not so much the feast but the survival of the club. 'If we can just weather out the storm until after the election we can save it.' He went on to describe how it had taken years to heal the division after the seceding Strickland supporters had rejoined in 1935. 'We must avoid a split at all costs, and the only way we can do that is to bury our political differences.' His technique for doing this was to have as few formal committee meetings as possible, to avoid discussing controversial subjects and to vote in secret, for in these times 'an open vote divides the members'.

The wise counsel and efforts of the older members, who have set politics aside, has so far kept the younger hot-heads from splitting the club. In spite of all the obstacles in its way, the feast of St. Martin turned out to be a good show. Though many supporters did not contribute, others gave more than usual and there were enough funds for a good feast. About a dozen boys worked under the direction of the two adult fireworkers, and made most of the fireworks. They gave a very good account of themselves, though not one of them is old enough (18) to join the club as a formal member. All are Catholic Action members. In fact, except for a few St. Roque boys, they are the only ones left in the society. The Catholic Action group once numbered almost fifty. The others, the sons of Labour families, had been forced out by the vote of loyalty to the Archbishop which the association's national headquarters had demanded. But their enthusiasm could not quite make up for their youth or their lack of numbers. During the Friday demonstration for the saint some outsiders who were supporters of the guest band had to help them carry the statue of their patron part of the way. This was a great comedown from the previous year, when his followers were so numerous that they had to struggle for a turn to carry him. But the noise and the gay atmosphere of the celebration rekindled the interest of a number of the Labour supporters. Several helped to erect the decorations on Saturday; a few even joined in one of the band matches.